

amount of money to be spent on education, prefer that it be distributed through an existing Federal program, the one existing Federal program that carries very few regulations with it, directly to the school districts of the United States, to be spent in the way that each of those school districts feels most appropriate. More teachers? Yes, where those school districts feel that is their No. 1 priority. Focused on special education where, as the Senator from New Hampshire pointed out, we have imposed innumerable burdens and regulations on our school districts but supply less than 10 percent of the money to meet those regulations? On other matters that may be more significant to particular school districts across the country? Yes.

In discussion of this issue in the course of the last 24 hours with a distinguished Democratic Member of the House of Representatives on the committee there dealing with education, we were told that even in that Representative's own district, the school boards could not be trusted. This Representative was eloquent on the tumbled-down nature of many of the schools in his city, eloquent on the lack of adequate teaching in that school district, but he was totally unwilling to let the people who elected both him and the school board members in his city—he was unwilling to allow those elected school board members to decide how this new money should be used. He was convinced, for some reason or another, that they would ignore the condition of their schools and the quality of their teachers and find something else to spend the money on.

Between that idea and ours, there is a great gulf fixed. We feel that if the school boards are allowed to determine how this money should be spent, it will, in the vast majority of all cases, be spent more wisely than it could possibly be spent under a set of one-size-fits-all regulations from Washington, DC, and we feel that there will be more money in the schools because less of it will be used for this 48-plus million hours of filling out paperwork.

Those are the two principal reasons for our perspective on this issue—a trust in the dedication of the parents and teachers and principals and superintendents and school board members to the education of the children committed to their care, and to the belief that the less the paperwork, the fewer the regulations, the more dollars that can get actually into the classroom.

That may be the last major issue separating us from the President in coming up with an overall omnibus budget and allowing this Congress to finish its work. But it is an issue of profound importance to every American—our students and our parents and all other Americans who wish to bequeath to their children and their grandchildren an even stronger America than the one they inherited from their parents.

Mr. THOMAS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak for 10 minutes in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Darlene Koontz, a fellow with the National Park Service, be granted the privilege of the floor for this afternoon's session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NATIONAL PARKS RESTORATION

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I rise today and come to the floor to thank the Senate and the House for the passage of S. 1693, the Vision 2020 bill, national parks reform. I think it is a great day for the Congress and for our national parks. Parks are one of the real resources, one of the real treasures that we have in this country that I think all of us have feelings for. There are lots of different parks and lots of different kinds of parks, but they are all our heritage. They are our culture.

I think we have known for some time that the parks have needed some assistance. They are more visited now than ever. They are more utilized, as they should be, by Americans than ever. The Park Service, on the other hand, thinks that they are at least \$10 billion in arrears in infrastructure costs and they need to change. I think there is a willingness to change on the part of the Park Service. So through hard work and bipartisan compromise we forged a bill that will preserve and help protect our parks now and well into the next century.

I have a special place in my heart for parks. I grew up right outside of Yellowstone Park near Cody, WY. We have the first park, Yellowstone, that is more than 125 years old now, also Grand Teton Park, which is, of course, a spectacular and unusual place, Devil's Tower. So parks are very much a part of the West. They also are very much part of the rest of the country. Right here in Virginia, last week my wife and I went to Philadelphia, Independence Park, one of the great treasures of our history. So I am very pleased with this legislation and I think it will be helpful.

Let me mention a few of the major provisions of S. 1693. First, it requires the Department to develop a strategic plan and comprehensive budget for the individual units. It is a large business. The budget is \$1.2 billion. So there has to, now, in addition to the management of resources, be management of a large financial issue. We need plans. We need a Park Service that has transparency in terms of its plans and in terms of its budget. There needs to be a budget. There needs to be assurance

that the expenditures are the same as the appropriations requests. That has not always been the case.

We need to establish a process for developing new parks. There are criteria for parks and they need to be followed. We have a proposition where there would be a study to see if, indeed, that park does square with the criteria that we have set forth. Too often, I think, Members of Congress have been able to bring parks into the system to be supported by Federal dollars when, frankly, they really perhaps did not meet the criteria that they should.

The bill provides for enhanced training opportunities for Park Service employees. Many of them have very specialized jobs, very specialized work to inventory and to understand what the resources are and to protect them. In my experience of working with Government and in this Government, I don't know of an agency that has a more dedicated staff than does the Park Service. They are people who are really committed to what they are doing and committed to the preservation of parks and making them useful. We need to help with opportunities for training.

We are providing for increased scientific study and research to ensure park resources are inventoried and they are, indeed, protected.

There are two purposes: The first purpose of the park, of course, is to maintain the resources, whether they be cultural or natural resources. The second is to provide for its owners, the American people, to visit. One of the elements of that, of course, is the concessions that provide the services that are necessary.

We have worked at changing the concessions policy and making it more competitive so that new businesses can have an opportunity to provide them, to provide them more efficiently, to provide more of an opportunity, and to pay some of the income to the park as a means of sustaining it.

We have eliminated the preferential right of renewal so that there is competition for those services as they are renewed.

We have authorized the new national park collectible passport which provides an opportunity for supporters of a park to pay a little something and to have in their car window or their house window this attractive passport that will allow us to help support the parks.

We provide for increased philanthropic support for individual units to help Friends of Yellowstone, for example, to raise money, and they raise significant amounts of money for parks.

We have authorized some studies for the Park Police which is necessary. We have some 400 Park Police right here in the Capital who have large responsibilities.

These are some of the changes that we have worked at. This is the first time in 18 years that we have had a generic parks bill that is designed not to deal with some specific park but rather to deal with the whole idea of a system